

## [B. G. Mathews]

[???] Dup

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER [Bessie Jollerton?] ADDRESS Ogallala, Neb.

DATE Nov. 5, 1938 SUBJECT B. G. Mathews recounts when the river was a problem

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT B. G. Mathews, Keystone, Nebraska

Have known Mr. Mathews for many years. He has done a great deal of writing from time to time.

In May, 188 when B. G. Mathews was on his way to the west coast with a sick brother, having to cross the mountains and fearing the change might be too sudden we decided to stop off at Ogallala, Nebr.

We went to North Platte Valley, by team and wagon, to see some of our old friends from North Missouri, who were homesteading, some of them were John Kelley, D. P. Holloway, W. A. Wilkinson. Lucian [Waugh?] and their families. By the way Mr. Waugh was a single, then there was Jesse Culver and family, the [Winters?], Brothers, Jim Balinger, the Major brothers, "Hank" Chestnut, Ted [Mcavoy?], Frank Foster, Abe Beedle, Harvey Knight, Adam Miller, and J. J. McCarthy and family.

There was a frame ranch house on the bank of the North Platte River owned by the Ogallala Land and Cattle Co., near where the town of Keystone is now situated. James Ware was manager, and Dick Bean was Foreman, of a bunch of cow hands, the only ones

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I can remember are Dick Bean, Harry Haythorn and J. J. McCarthy, Mr. Reed, and the Andy Bernet families. [???

Mysteriously rolled together to the north was the gloomy sand hills, crisscrossed by little valleys, running in most every direction.

Most all the settlers were along the foot hills with a part of their claims in the valley. Here we visited a couple of weeks, my brother grew weaker, so we gave up the coast trip, returning to Missouri where my last brother passed away. Having pioneer blood in my veins, I bought out a relinquishment, from a cowboy and became a pioneer settler, and built a good sod house, there were only two sod houses in the neighborhood.

There was quite a little empire of Government land fenced and controlled by two large cattle companies, Ogallala and John Bratt companies.

Finally some little trouble developed between these companies and the settlers, the settlers thinking they as much right, to the Government land as the cattle men. There was not much raised until 1891 when they raised a bumper crop, but now the bottom was out of the prices; most of them had wild hay which they baled, hauled across the river on the ice much of which did not bring enough to pay freight expenses when they shipped it to Denver. During the 90's came the drought, with its cold blizzard many times lasting three days at a time, with the mercury down to 30 and 35 below zero. With the regular Spring prairie fires for a hundred miles supposed to have been set by either white or Indian hunters.

Everything used on the ranches must come from Ogallala, and if the river was not fordable, they had to go to the bridge 8 or 10 mi. west and in the short days of winter it would take all day and part of the night to go to town and back. In the summer there was the hot winds and sand storms that scorched everything in their pathway. There was the green head flies, deer flies, buffalo nats, mosquitoes, and prairie dog towns filled with

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rattle snakes, and owls which lived together, there were some of the objectional things the pioneer had to put up with.

But most of the streams grew lots of fruits such as wild plums, currants, grapes, and chokecherries, which most every one appreciated, and there were no restrictions on deer, antelope, a few elk, prairie hens curlew and clover, Jack snipe, wild geese and Brant, the musical [sandhill?] crane, the quacking of the ducks of every description, even to the mournful song of the white swan, and the desert Pelican, greeted our ears night and day. Then there was the hideous howling of the cyote, at night mingled with the howling of the gray wolf. The writer stayed alone for two years before sending for his little family, he did his own cooking and dish washing. Says he would hang his game on the gable end of his sod house and the coyotes would come around at night and snap, grow and fight to get at it, then he would take his gun out and shoot among them to drive them away.

The sand hills were covered with buffalo chips which the settlers used for fuel, as they had no money to buy coal to amount to anything. They would build up stacks of fuel as large as the house for winter.

One day Mr. Kelly found a human skull with a bullet hole through it, Mr. Mathews says he does not remember whether the mystery was ever cleared up as to who the man was or not.

As new settlers came in a new school district No. [12was?] organized, they built a sod school house, the first school teacher was Miss Anna Reed, later a frame school house was built and burned down.

There was the Lennard families, Mark and James, Forest Mannon, Edd Mathews, the aged Dr. Ryan and his wife, Alee Reece and family, Cornelious Fenwick family, Geo, McGinley family, Knight Bros. and the [Sillasson?] Bros. and many others.

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Silas Sillason came here in 1882, Jens in '88, Anna in '92, Lewis in '96, John in '99, Silas, Jens and Andrew were cowboys on the John Bratt Ranch at the head of the birdwood creek. Silas and Jens became cattle men on their own responsibility, Jens on the old Ballinger, built a frame house and was married [Mayme?] Mathews, Oct. 1889, and became one of the leading cattlemen of this part of the country.. Many of the settlers had small herds at that time and later became very prominent stockmen.

In 1887 the first election was held in Whitetail precinct was held in the ranch house of the old Ogallala Land and Cattle Company, in 1887.

A great many of the settlers filed on timber claims and planted bushels of seed, but only along the streams of water that was fed by the many springs, did any trees grow successfully. Also in 1888 a community Sunday school was organized in the little sod school house, nearly every one in the country attended. Dr. Ryan a cultured man. This church was very successful, until the Methodist held revivals in community, which practically vanished the [Evangelioan?] church as it was called.

After the Keystone ranch was burned, they moved to the Jesse Culver ranch and reorganized as the Ware Costin Cattle Co.

In 1906 Mr. W. A. Paxton Jr. through the Paxton Investment Co. divided and sold the Paxton holdings, the U. P. Railroad ran a branch road up the valley, and the village of Keystone was laid out and lots were sold. Cornelious Fenwick, who was already postmaster, in his sod house, built the first building and was postmaster. The writer in 1907 built the first business house and moved his stock of goods to the new village; The Welpton Lumber Co. erected a building and handled hardware and lumber, also started banking, [T m?] Dutch as manager, shortly afterwards a bank was put up and Robert Barber cashier and Clyde Stritton as assistant.

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Mrs. Sarah Scully who had come to the Paxton ranch and boarded his cowboys, erected the Scully Hotel. H. P. Wigg was the first depot agent in 1910, followed by Frank Baer, Nov. 10, Joe Wilson in 1913.

In 1908, Sept. 15th a conference was held at the Paxton home for the purpose of erecting a church with twin pulpits and reversible seats, Mrs Sarah Scully furnished the alter, the first protestant preacher was Rev. Burhans, of the Presbyterian church, later followed by Rev. John Campbell, who occupied the little church three years, then followed the erection of the new and larger church which he has occupied ever since. For fourteen years he and his good wife, have carried on, he preached the word of God with great force and earnestness. They have a great flock of followers. He has married our young people and buried our dead, and we don't intend them to quit their job.

Louis Sillason coming from the County Treasureship in Ogallala [?]. The store and stock of goods from the writer, a Sunday school was organized and held in the new church building and he was the earnest and efficient superintendent.

In the vicinity of Keystone only Harvey Knight, F. [?]. Foltz and the writer remain of the first settlers here. The first settlers were a social and happy lot, in spite of the hardships we met often in social games and parties. The sod houses were comfortable, warm in winter and cool in summer. The old settlers were gone but their boys and girls are going forward with their work. Old Father Time has turned his Kaleiodescopic mirror on the days gone by and changed the scenes of those simply happy days, leaving memories sad or memories sublime: But tragedy has reared its ugly head, and has taken its toll among the best: "Dick" Bean, Andrew, Sillasen, Billie Costin and Jen Sillasen, all died accidental deaths.

"The Pioneer's Star" The night was bitter bold, the road was but a trail, As he trudged along beside his jaded team, Homeward bound with prevender and precious mail, Letters from the old home, Now a dream. The landscape lay beneath the stars, a whited silver sheen, And the rapid river gurgled beneath the ice and snow, Along its winding banks, the

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trail was daily seen, The far-off stars providing but the faintest glow. No rancher's lighted dwelling stood in sight, No noisy barking dogs, with friendly urge, But the yelp of hungry coyotes appeared the night, And the snarling gray wolf howled his dirge. His hands were numb, his feet were cold, His body chilled, his breath was frozen on his beard, The horses hoof-beats, rhythmic in the snowy mold, Shrill and weird the frosty wagon tires' song was heard. Then in the darkening night he saw a single star, Outshining all the rest, but not in Heaven's dome. Through the mists and frosts it shown, through yet afar, And how he shouts to see the window of his home. The gleaming light now warms his chilling blood, His soul is filled with happy thought For little ones and wife, so young so fair, so good In the little soddy home that earnest toil had wrought. In the warmth and shelter of his little den, The tables spread with richest food, of wilderness fare, Tender steak of antelope, and juicy prairie hen, The steaming coffee pot warm biscuits light and rare. The horses in the stable warm and munching hay, With wife and little ones full of glee and cheer, No King in all his glory, or feudal lord of ancient day, Was as happy in his kingdom as the early pioneer.